**TONIC**

*I was jerked from my drunken haze. Pulled quickly into reality. Everything was clear, every image searing into my head. He was above me, his dark beady eyes staring into mine, his greasy hair now pulled back into a slick pony tail. His nicotine breath blowing on my face. I could see the wrinkles settling in on his face. Forty-something did not look good on him. He leaned over me, the entire force of his body holding me down, immobilizing me.*

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The sun beat down on the traveling blue and yellow airport shuttle, causing my legs to melt to the seat as the driver babbled on about the weather in Texas (my home state) while Mexican pop music filled the metal box I had been trapped in for the past hour and a half. I pulled out my phone re-reading, for what must have been the 42nd time that shuttle ride, the same Facebook message from Ben (my on again, off again, person I was dating exclusively, who I called my boyfriend, sometimes, not to his face, but who refused to recognize that he was in a relationship… non-boyfriend… type thing). I had been repeatedly reading the message since I woke up at 4:30 that morning. No matter how many times I read the message, it still said “My life is too complicated right now, can we date again when school starts?” I didn’t believe in life being “too complicated” to be with the person you wanted to be with, but I accepted it anyways. What else was I supposed to do?

After two hours with the man on the bus, two 90 plus minute flights, two hours of driving to the airport, and re-reading the non-breakup-more-like-on-pause message from Ben 150 times, I finally arrived at my best friend’s summer apartment in Bethesda, Maryland ready for a night in Washington, D.C..

The metro ride was full of giddy excitement as we drank our vodka filled juice drinks “concealed” in recycled clear plastic water bottles. I was in one of my favourite cities in the world, heading to one of my favourite parts of that city, DuPont Circle, ready to take on the world and to (for once) be that crazy drunken college kid I usually refrained from being. My goal? To get tipsy enough to escape all of my problems, do something semi-stupid and sleep it all off the next day.

As we stood moving slowly upwards on the grand escalator leading out of the DuPont metro stop and out onto the circle I received a text message. My problems had found me and were about to get worse.

Four words from my non-boyfriend: “I have testicular cancer,” appeared on the screen. I realized in that moment life *could* be too complicated.

He continued on with three pages of how I was not to tell anyone back home because I was the first to know and he *would* be okay, but he wanted me to be there for him if I could. I had every intention of being there for him, even if I had my own list of problems to deal with.

My face was pale by the time we hit the lights of the street and my body was trembling as I tried to breathe through the panic attack that was attempting to take over my body.

‘*Not here, Not now’.* I thought to myself. I had come to DC to get away, but here I just found more problems. Megan looked at me with her round face that she had done up with “going out” make-up in shades of dark grays. Her blonde hair was straightened and hairsprayed into perfection and she was wearing her black “boob” shirt that made her ladies look particularly inviting to any man walking by. Megan had been my best friend for almost two years. Needless to say, by now she could tell something bad had just happened simply by looking at my face.

“What’s wrong?” she said.

“Ben has cancer.”

She stared at me, silently urging me to explain more.

“Testicular cancer.” I continued, needing to tell someone and knowing that she didn’t fit the “back home” description he had so specifically mentioned.

“Holy shit!”

People pushed past us as they tried to get to the surrounding bars. I could see in her face she was processing everything that I was trying to process. She had paid for me to come here because I needed out of that white walled room I called my home, where all I had to think about was failing out of school and what the results of my own tests for cancer would reveal the next week. We both knew I wasn’t expecting happy results from the test either. Now with the non-breakup with the boy who stole my heart that now had cancer …

“Is he okay?” she asked interrupting my thoughts.

“Well, he has cancer…”

“Are *you* okay?”

I was definitely not okay. I started walking to the ATM to withdraw cash for the night. What was happening to Ben was real. He’d already gotten his results. And if it could happen to him, then it could happen to me.

“I’ll be fine.” I answer while swallowing bubble of rushed panic.

“Do you still want to get shitfaced?”

“Fuck yeah!” I didn’t need to pause to think in order to make that bad decision.

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Two bars and six fruity, liquor filled cocktails later I was one very happy drunk. Drunk dialing my friends just to tell them they’re pretty and how much I loved them, talking to strangers in the bar about how amazing the television show *Weeds* is, and generally loving all of the pretty lights outside while laughing, and drinking, my problems away, as planned.

Still, I couldn’t knock the feeling that so much had gone wrong already that night. With the alcohol still soaking in and the hour getting late, I began to think it was a good idea to go home. I didn’t say any of this to Megan, however, instead I let her lead me to another bar, another drink, to take my mind further off every bad thing I was running from.

I stumbled down Connecticut Avenue to Kramer Books, a cramped bookstore/bar/restaurant/bakery. We made our way through the two rooms crowded with books. Sounds of chatter and forks clanging against plates and smells of wonderful types of pie floated from the restaurant in the back and filled the bookstore. Megan led me into a dark, narrow bar area that also served as a second hallway to the restaurant area behind us. I was in a deep drunken conversation with the nice, also drunk, man sitting near me when Megan’s boyfriend showed up to surprise her.

He was nicely built, somewhat handsome with a flat face and tanned skin. He seemed to glow in the dim light of the bar. This was not how I wanted to meet my best friend’s boyfriend for the first time. Bring drunk out of my mind somehow doesn’t make a great first impression.

I didn’t pay much attention to what Megan and Z (we called him that because no one could pronounce his name although I believe it is pronounced “Zoo-hair”. Ironic, since he was basically hairless… *everywhere*) talked about. I didn’t have the ability to pay attention to anything for very long. The next thing I knew we were on a bus headed off on new adventure to a new bar in a new part of the city, a new chance to drink away my ever growing list of problems.

We arrived at Tonic, a dark bar with a pink glow and usably clean bathrooms.

My phone by this point was practically glued to my hand, as it usually is when I get enough alcohol into my system, Ben was all I could think about. Despite the massive amounts of alcohol that I had been attempting to use as a numbing device, he still had cancer, I might have cancer, and all my problems had just managed to travel to DC with me. It was becoming too much to handle. I needed to talk to him and although I had promised Megan that he would be the one person I didn’t drunk dial, she had said nothing about drunk texting.

Since the bar was in a basement I stepped outside and pulled myself up the stairs by the railing. One arm at a time grasping to hold onto the railing as I conquered the mini-mountains in front of me. Once at the top of the stairs, which looking down seemed much shorter than they did going up, I collapsed onto a step. I picked up the phone and typed in some words. The words “You’re awesome” appearing a minimum of five times in the two page text message.

As I waited for his response, which never came, I decided to drunk dial a few more friends and maybe five or so minutes later Megan arrived at my side to check on me.

“You okay sweetie?” She asked. I could tell she had sobered up from the only bar that didn’t check her ID to find out that she was underage.

“Iiiiiiiii’m Grrrreat!” I said with my best drunken Tony the Tiger impression.

“What are you doing?” Her eyes moving to my phone, spying to see if I was trying to phone Ben.

“Just textttttingg people,” I said with a big, guilty grin on my face. I am a horrible liar and she knows it.

“Did you text Ben?”

“He has cancer!” I said in my defense.

“Sarah ….”

“Whaaaat????? He didn’t respond. What kind of … jerk … tells you they have cancer and doesn’t respond. But it’ssss okay becausssse you’re pretty and I loooove you!” I rambled on.

“You want more to drink?”

“Damn straight!” I replied.

“Hey ladies,” came a deep voice from behind us. The voice had a hint of attempted sexiness in it as he drew the words out. It was far from sexy though.

It was at this point in time that I first noticed the man sitting behind me. My guess is he had been there the whole time, but nevertheless, I had failed to notice him in my drunken blurs. Now all I can remember him as is that he was simply male. I am unsure of if he was drunk, stoned, greasy, seedy, resembling an ex-convict, a business man versus a “business” man, blonde, brunette, white, black. But, I decided this guy was friendly enough.

I could tell Megan wanted to ignore him, but I let him continue talking. “Either of you want some herb?”

I wasn’t quite sure at the moment what herb was, but I knew I wanted it. I looked at Megan with a puzzled expression, just to make sure that I wasn’t too off track from what I thought it was.

“Weed, honey,” she said in her disapproving mother tone, but that was not going to stop me.

“Hell yeah!” I said taking the joint from his hand. He passed me the lighter and I looked at it as if it were some foreign mythological contraption I had never seen before. “You may have to light this. I think I’m too drunk.”

I handed him back the lighter but he looked at me straight in the eyes and said, “Well if you’re too drunk to light, then you’re too drunk to smoke.”

It was like the words were marking a challenge and I was not going to have any of that. I snatched the lighter from his hands, held the joint, and lit it, allowing the flame to linger just so that he knew I had taken his challenge and triumphed. I took a long deep drag. The smoke hit the back of my throat quickly with a burn and I liked the fire inside of me. I held the smoke in my lungs for as long as I could then released, passing the joint back to the man. I could feel it going to my head immediately, although in retrospect that was more than likely the alcohol.

Megan ushered me inside before I could do anything else stupid, but there it was, at 1:28 AM I had completed what I wanted to complete, my semi-stupid task of the night. While taking pot from the stranger, without screaming “stranger danger” seventeen million times in a row or “just saying no” to drugs, I had broken two of the cardinal elementary school rules. I felt accomplished.

I celebrated my semi-stupid act by doing something more stupid and downed drink number seven (a particularly tasty Sex on the Beach) in thirty seconds flat, exclaiming that it tasted like heaven and begging my friends for another one.

They cut me off.

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Z had invited us to stay with him that night if we wanted. I didn’t want. But Megan wanted to, so I reluctantly agreed as she helped pull me up off the side walk where I was watching the pretty tree shimmy like a top rate belly dancer above me.

Z’s apartment was a basement apartment with a window that was at street level, so all you could see outside were feet. As we walked in there was a mattress on the ground and atop it a sleeping object that appeared to be some form of human, although by the long hair I couldn’t make out if it was a man or woman. There was a nice couch and a book case. Everything else was rather sparse and dirty.

“That’s Homid,” Z said to us as we slipped in.

“Hom-mead” I repeated to myself. Determined to remember his name, but by the end of the night it would be a name I would never forget.

Hearing his name, the man on the mattress sat up. He was dirty, his face and hair shiny even in the darkness from either sweat or grease. Either way he looked gross and either way I was immediately uncomfortable.

Z got me a blanket and I settled in on the couch as Megan disappeared into Z’s room and the boys stepped outside for a late night cigarette. I was left alone to let my eyes finally fall shut and get some much needed sleep.

The boys returned and Z disappeared into his room closing the door to safety behind him. Homid began talking. He was determined to have a conversation with me in those moments. I politely replied, enjoying the religious debate he had started, but I found myself unequipped to deal with in my current state of pure intoxication. Then he finally said the words I had so desperately wanted to hear, “Let’s get some sleep.”

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*He leaned over me, the entire force of his body holding me down, immobilizing me.*

*His lips touched mine as his tongue jammed down my throat. It was gross, gagging me as it went further down my throat. Tasting like cool copper, cigarettes and salt, slipping around my teeth and over my tongue. I turned my head, grazing his tongue with my teeth, causing him to pull out.*

*“What are you doing?” I asked trying to silence the fear in my voice.*

*“Come on baby, don’t you want to have fun?”*

*“I have a boyfriend.” I blurted out, even though this wasn’t quite true.*

*“But we could have fun; he’d never have to know.”*

*\*\*\**

Megan sat on the mattress in the middle of the messy room wearing nothing more than one of Z’s t-shirts and messy morning sex hair. It was 7 AM and by the looks of her, Z had woken her up for morning sex before hopping in the shower.

“We have to leave.” It wasn’t a question, it was a statement.

“What happened?” Megan asked.

“We have to leave – NOW!” I said. I stared at her for a moment. This is what I should have done the night before… but didn’t.

“Well can’t we wait for Z to…”

“Megan, we have to leave. Seriously. I want to go home, right now.” I said as I fought back the tears again.

“What happened?” she asked. Her tone had gone from exasperated to sincere concern with a pinch of curiosity.

“I’ll tell you when we leave. I just want to get out of here.”

Z came back into the room, luckily wearing a towel. He looked at the two of us on the bed together and turned around, heading to the kitchen. I stood up and headed out to the living room to get my stuff where Z shoved a couple individually wrapped waffles in my hands.

“Here, you’ll want these; they’ll make you feel better. Eat! Eat!” he said with his thick Moroccan accent. His smile was innocent and huge; he had no idea what kind of pervert he had let live in his house. I smiled and headed towards the door, walking slowly past the mattress where Homid slept. We were almost out the door when he shot up to stare at us.

“Where you girls off to? Come, come, stay with me while Z is at work. We’ll have fun.”

My stomach bubbled as I heard the word fun escape his mouth. I knew by now his definition of the word “fun” was far from my own definition. I bolted out the door and Megan followed, asking furiously what was going on.

We proceeded to the bus stop on the corner. I was walking full speed ahead, not looking back and ignoring all the questions coming from Megan’s mouth. I wasn’t ready to talk about it.

The bus wasn’t going to be there for another half hour. I could see the apartment from the bus stop and feel the nerves in my stomach. Logically, I knew it was bright outside, the streets were filled with people, and he was too damned lazy to get out of bed unless of course we agreed to “have fun”. Yet, I still felt the need to break out at a run, going as far away from the spot as possible, but I stood still. I was undecided as to whether my heart was beating in my stomach or my throat at this point, and the alcohol wasn’t helping much either, causing my stomach to begin to cramp and allowing the nausea to set in.

We walked to the 7/11 down the street, where with a bat of my eyes, a sweet yet polite smile, and a slightly thicker Southern accent than usual I convinced the wrinkly Middle Eastern man to let me use the employee bathroom.

Hands on my knees, trying not to collapse onto the dirty used-to-be-white tile floor, I took the opportunity to finally be alone.

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*“Come on baby, don’t you want to have fun?”*

*“I have a boyfriend.” I blurted out, even though this wasn’t quite true.*

*“But we could have fun; he’d never have to know.”*

*“He just found out that he has testicular cancer, I’m not going to make his life worse.” I said, burying my face in the couch, too scared to look up, too exhausted to fight back.*

*“He’d never have to know baby,” he said again as he began to kiss my cheek and rub his hands up and down my body.*

*“He would know. I don’t lie to people.” This didn’t stop him as he used his tongue to try to create a new hole in my cheek attempting. My cheek became slimy. His hand ran up my shirt and he brushed over my breasts.*

*“Don’t!” I snapped, looking at him with as much hate in my eyes as I could muster, but it wasn’t enough.*

*“Your friend is having fun baby, they’re having good fun in there. You don’t want to be the only one in the city not having fun tonight do you? We could have fun,* this *could be fun.” He said as he once again ran his hands up my shirt.*

*“I’m not having fun,” I snapped. I doubted that anything with him could be fun.*

*“Well then let’s make it fun.” He whispered pulling my face towards his.*

*He kissed me. I gave in and kissed him back, feeling completely disgusted. Hating myself for letting his lips touch mine, for giving in and kissing him back, for thinking that just maybe if I let him kiss me he would get enough of what he wanted and leave me alone. His lips pressed harder against mine as bile began to rise from my stomach.*

*“Stop! I can’t do this!” I said, pulling back the short distance I was able to and trying to push him off of me.*

*“Baby, come on … “*

*“No!” I said, cutting him off.*

*“Fine, I need a cigarette anyways,” he said standing up.*

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As we left the store, Gatorade and crackers in hand, we walked in silence. I felt ashamed for not making better decisions in the moment, for just lying there after he left, for everything that had happened. I couldn’t talk.

Eventually we had made it about a mile past the bus top. We were on a corner that, unfortunately, neither of us recognized. It was different from most of the other streets I had been on in DC, most of the buildings were made of white concrete and posters hung everywhere, advertising everything from HIV testing to the hottest new cell phone. There was a small farmer’s market set up on either corner of the street, playing festive music as people scurried around the colorful fruits and vegetables buying all they could on this Saturday morning. On one corner, a couple of men were grilling fresh hamburgers and chicken kabobs that would have smelled good if I wasn’t on the verge of throwing up. The whole atmosphere around us was fun, but all our minds were saying was *‘lost, you’re lost, must find home!’*

We walked past the grill station after spotting a bus stop with a map on it. Trying to read the map, my stomach cramped and I knew something really nasty was going to exit my body one way or another. I ran for the nearest CVS (which normally has a bathroom), almost forgetting to tell Megan to meet me there. To my dismay there was no public restroom. I walked back onto the streets where I did a little dance paired with deep breathing exercises while looking around for somewhere, *anywhere* with a bathroom. There it was, a Save-A-Lot grocery store across the street. Grocery stores *always* have bathrooms. I didn’t even bother to look as I sprinted across the street, busted through the doors and asked the first person wearing a red apron where the bathroom was.

There was only a concrete walled “family style” restroom with a matching concrete floor and ceiling. That room became my home for the next twenty minutes. Trying to decide whether I needed to throw up or not, I sat there, shaking and hoping that no one wanted in there anytime soon.

It wasn’t until I had been there for about ten minutes that I realized Megan, by now, was probably looking for me. I pulled my cell phone out of the bag and pushed it open. Nothing happened. The screen was black and no matter how many times I hit the power button it just stayed black. It was mocking me. Stranding me in a bathroom where I was probably about to expel the entire contents of my stomach into a toilet *and* onto a concrete floor at the same time. It was setting me up for what could potentially be the most embarrassing experience of my life. I fought the nausea and the pain with everything I had in me until I finally got myself to a point where I was able to leave the concrete cell of a bathroom and begin to look for a way to find Megan.

Most of the northern people ignored me. Maybe it was my Southern meets Midwest accent identifying me as an outsider, or maybe it is just the way they behave up in Washington DC, but either way I didn’t take too kindly to their lack of neighborly compassion. In the South people would be more than willing to help someone normally, even if they do it with a fake smile that really means ‘why the fuck are you bothering me’. But no one was even willing to give me a flash of a smile, much less a ‘why are you bothering me’ smile.

I went over to the meat section. The only section of the store with smells that weren’t helping in my fight to keep the alcohol inside of my body. A large black man, wearing a white blood stained apron, black t-shirt and clear plastic elbow high gloves smiled at me from behind the counter. Surprisingly, it was a genuine smile. He helped the middle-classed man in front of me figure out just exactly what steak to buy for him and his wife, and then turned to look at me.

“What can I get for ya?” He asked with the familiar Southern accent I never realized I loved so much. It was comforting to have something familiar when I had absolutely no idea where I was.

“Where can I find a payphone?”

“I think they’re in Union Square,” I guess he saw my blank stare because he laughed at me and asked, “Long night?”

It was at that moment that it dawned on me just how ridiculously crap-a-licious I looked. I smiled and replied with a slight chuckle, “You could definitely say that. So how do you get to Union Square?”

“You aren’t from around these parts are you?” He asked. It was obvious that he wasn’t either.

“No, and I’m kind of lost and got separated from my friend who is, but my cell phone died.”

He pulled off a glove and fished through his pocket. “Here,” he said handing me his cell phone, “Call your friend.”

It was the nicest thing anyone did for me while I was in DC.

I handed the man back his phone after giving Megan directions on how to get to the grocery store. He looked at me with a smile then without asking why he simply stated, “You know, you have sad eyes. Very pretty, but very sad eyes.” Then he walked away.

Ten minutes later a very worried Megan and I reunited next to aisle 6 in between the soup cans and ketchup, as she almost knocked me into a shelf full of canned tomatoes while trying to wrap her arms around me acting as if I was her long lost child she had finally found.

“I was so worried.”

“Can we just go home?” I asked exasperatedly.

“Yeah, the metro…”

“No, let’s get a taxi, I’ll pay. I really just want to sleep.”

We left the store and Megan hailed a taxi in a very city-like manner that I didn’t think she would ever be able to possess. I was proud. We sat in the cab, her in the middle seat and me next to the window. We made it through one stop light, then a second, over a bridge, and then the car stopped moving. I looked out the window and saw the best looking trash can in the whole world, shiny, black, dusty, covered in something sticky, filled with pizza boxes and plastic bag hanging from one side, and just asking for me to throw up in it.

The nauseas feeling that had been building in my stomach since the moment Homid laid a hand on me finally entered my throat. At full speed 72 ounces of alcohol were defying gravity.

In a blur of a moment, I croaked, “I need out,” fidgeting hurriedly with the door, trying to bust it open as the taxi driver used his hands to physically push me out of the car, screaming at me in a foreign language. After what felt like five minutes, but could not have been more than ten seconds, I escaped the car and made it to the most beautiful trash can in all of DC and, as if in slow motion. I watched the lime green contents of rotted alcohol spew from my body like water from a fire hose. I held on to the edges of the trash can as if the ground below me was going to disappear at any moment, clinging to it just so I could stay standing. It was a victorious moment for me, as people walking by got to see just why you shouldn’t drink so much on a Friday night. I had made it to the trash can, though, and avoided the seventy five dollar cleaning fee for the taxi cab. Score.

It was the most embarrassing and relieving moment of my life. And honestly, I was just glad that no one on the street was a sympathy spewer, as I didn’t want to share my trashcan. We had gone a whole six blocks, or fifteen dollars worth of a taxi ride. I guess Megan paid the man and he drove off, after holding up traffic for a whole round of green lights. By the time I was finished with round one, she was standing by my side. I wiped my mouth and smiled, noting that alcohol tastes even worse coming up than it does going down.

We were in Adam’s Morgan, luckily, on the street with the Metro Station. My body could not have picked a better spot turn on me. The street was lined with restaurants and a couple of souvenir shops. Down the way was another CVS attached to a McDonald’s, which I knew for a fact always had a bathroom. It was about as far as I could see my body going for a bit. So we made our way through the crowded streets. I avoided looking at the faces of people. While there were no remnants of my hang over episode on the corner left on my mouth or anywhere on my clothing, most everyone had still seen it and I was now redder from embarrassment than anything else. We made our way to the basement McDonald’s as people pointed and stared. Megan got herself something to eat and I just stared at the cup of sprite she bought me.

She stared at me. “What happened?”

I had to tell her. I took a small sip of the Sprite as I explained to Megan what had happened at Z’s apartment. Though, I spared her most of the details I was too uncomfortable to talk about. As far as she knew, he just kissed me, tried to convince me to have sex a couple of times and eventually fondled my breasts (*over* my shirt) without my permission.

“I’m a horrible friend,” Megan finally said, breaking the silence that had taken place as soon as I finished telling her.

This wasn’t uncommon of Megan. She was always and still is worried about how other people perceive her. She also always needed someone to take care of her, to reassure her that she wasn’t a total fuck up like everyone else in her family was. This was my problem, but she had made it her own. And this time, I welcomed the distraction.

“Why would you say that?” I asked. She took it literally, as I knew she would, but what I meant was ‘*Why the hell would you say something like that and make this all about you?’*

“I got you drunk, and then left you alone with Homid. I honestly didn’t know he was that much of a creep.”

“I wanted to get drunk, it’s not like I ever said no to the alcohol.” This time I was the mothering friend.

“But still, I could have cut you off earlier and I shouldn’t have just left you there, we should have gone home,” she argued. Honestly, I couldn’t agree more, but I wasn’t going to tell her that. I had never really said no to crashing on Z’s couch, and therefore had no right to complain about being there. Instead I just shrugged my shoulders and let her continue, “I mean, if I knew what was going on we would have left, but we heard you talking so I thought everything was okay.”

That’s when my thought process flipped from ‘poor me, I can’t believe that happened’ to taking care of Megan. It really wasn’t her fault and as much as I wanted to blame someone else. It was and always would be entirely my responsibility. My fault.

“It’s not your fault.” I reassured her.

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*I heard him go outside and believing it was over I laid there for a moment, holding back the tears, breathing through the panic that was building inside me again, trying to wake up from the nightmare I had gotten myself into. What he had done wasn’t that horrible, but wasn’t welcomed either. The alcohol still being the main force behind my decisions I could not bring myself to leave the couch. Instead I grabbed my cell phone, bringing it closer into my body. I texted Megan over and over again saying we needed to go home, but the thing about basement apartments is there is no cell phone signal. Still I let the text messages continue their attempt to send, knowingly letting it use up my battery, in hopes that I would have a good reason to leave. But instead, I was left scared and vulnerable.*

*I gave up on getting a response and rolled over onto my stomach, crossing my legs and protecting myself the best way I knew how, with a blanket. I had just finished building my blanket cocoon when I heard him come in. With him came the stench of cigarette smoke and a blast of hot and sticky summer air. Almost immediately the lights disappeared. I let my body relax as I thought I heard him crawl back onto his mattress.*

*The blanket flew to my feet as he ripped it from underneath my 230 pound body with a force that made my skin burn. His hand was sliding up my back, lifting up my shirt, his fingers fidgeting with the hooks on my bra. I squirmed but he held me still. He tried to turn me over, but I wouldn’t budge. His hand ran up and down my body. He managed to flip me onto my back. I was stuck. He had my shirt half way up and unbuttoned my jeans. His tongue licked my face the way you would expect a half blind dog to, as he tried to find my face in the darkness.*

*The tears built up behind my eyelids which were squeezed shut blocking out all visions of the real life nightmare unfolding on top of me. I was not going to cry or be weak if this was going to happen. But I knew that at this point, I had no choice but to let what was going to happen, happen.*

*I gave in. I went limp. I stopped fighting, stopped saying no, stopped moving. He could do what he wanted to me.*

*He kept kissing me, his hand slipping into my underwear, his lips on my breast, touching me, feeling me. Then he stopped. He was like a bear, and I was playing dead. He disappeared. I heard a groan of frustration as he headed back to his bed.*

*I blacked out.*

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In fear that I would start crying, I cracked a joke.

“I mean does a forty year old man really think he can get this sexy bod? I mean, Hello!!!!” The sarcasm dripped from every word.

Megan laughed and from that point on, despite all the bad, it became a joke between us. One really sick, twisted, unfunny joke. But I couldn’t help it. The more I talked about it, the worse I felt, but the more jokes I cracked, the more I could laugh.

“Aren’t men supposed to be better at kissing by his age?”, “ I mean really now, who thinks that the entrance to a woman’s mouth is in her cheek?”, “Did he take kissing lessons from a Great Dane or something?”

With every insult wrapped in a joke, I laughed a little louder and felt a little better … even if the jokes were the lamest ones to ever be created in the history of all humanity.

We sat in the McDonald’s for another hour or so, talking normally, joking about Homid and his attempts. I was throwing up every fifteen minutes or so in the pay-bathroom that was luckily broken so I didn’t have to pay 50 cents every time I wanted to watch more green liquids pour from my body. Eventually, I mistakenly felt as if I could conquer the metro.

We trekked across the parking lots between the metro stop and her apartment, towing my vomit filled CVS bag from the unsuccessful metro ride home with me. It was hot outside and I was tired. Everything was weighing down on me, the embarrassment, the happenings with Homid, my worries about Ben, my worries about myself; they all just seemed to be taking over until we got to the elevator with the air conditioning.

My body didn’t like the motion of the elevator and as soon as we hit floor 15 I burst through the doors and let the final trace amounts of alcohol flow up my throat and out of my body.

I curled up against the wall, pillows propped in the corner so I could sleep while sitting. Megan left me alone in the room as I called Ben. It was on rare occasion that he answered his phone, so I left him a message, asking him to call me back. He never did and unbeknownst to me at the time we would break up for a final time 9 days later. Not because of his cancer, or because of what happened to me in DC, but because he couldn’t date a girl who might have cancer, ever.

But with everything out of my body, the hope that I would hear his voice soon, and the exhaustion settling in once more, I let go of my problems. I snuggled up with the pillow on the bed, now comfortable in my pajamas. Nothing could bother me. I could finally escape all of my problems. All I had left to do was sleep.